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PERSONAL RELIGION, *a necessary*  
*Qualification in a* MINISTER of  
the GOSPEL. *1/2*

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A  
S E R M O N,  
PREACHED AT A  
Meeting of Ministers,  
IN  
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE,  
AUGUST 3<sup>d</sup>, 1743.

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By GEORGE BRUCE, M. A.  
Publish'd at the Request of the Ministers who heard it,  
The SECOND EDITION.

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*For a Bishop must be blameless, — not given to Wine, no Striker,  
not given to filthy Lucre; — a Lover of good Men, sober, just,  
holy, temperate. Tit. i. 7, 8.*

*— Be thou an Example of the Believers, in Word, in Conversa-  
tion, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity. 1 Tim. iv. 12.*

*Hæc aliis dic, ut dum dicis, audias; ipse scribe, ut dum scrip-  
feris legas. SENECA.*

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## P R E F A C E.

*THO'* it be true, as the Title Page declares, that the following Sermon comes abroad at the Instance of some Friends, (without which there was not the remotest Intention to publish it) yet the worthy Author thinks proper to acquaint the World, that he means to make no other Advantage of this Circumstance, than to guard against the Rashness and Impertinence of those, who might otherwise accuse him of Forwardness to shew himself in Print. But as to any thing that may happen to be exceptionable in the Sermon itself, that, he desires, may be imputed solely to him, and not to his Friends; rightly judging, that what might easily escape them in hearing, ought not to have escaped him in revising, and preparing for publick View; and that it is as common, in Cases of this Nature, for Friends to be too candid and tender, as it is for others to be too severe and critical.

'Tis hoped, however, there is nothing in this Discourse, of which either the Author or his Friends will have Cause to be ashamed. For my own Part, I am not afraid to own, I was one of those who desired the Publication of it. I heard it with Pleasure, and took it for granted I should read it with more. I thought it a very fit and seasonable Admonition to us all; and am still of Opinion, that the Dignity of the sacred Ministry can never be retrieved, nor its Credit and Usefulness supported, but by attending to the laudable and important Things recommended in it.

Some, perhaps, may think it bears too hard upon the ignorant and vicious Part of the Clergy, and may possibly give Encouragement to some to behave towards them after a disrespectful and unbecoming Manner. But why should any be in Pain for such Men? Is any Respect due to them? Are they not the Disgrace of their Order, and is it not thro' them that Religion itself suffers, and is daily exposed to the Scoffs and Sneers of witling Deists and Infidels? Why then should we be afraid of seeing them abhorred, who cause the very Offering of the Lord to

be abhorred; and bring even *Virtue* itself into Contempt. For my Part, I freely declare, that I have no other Concern about these Men, but what respects their Reformation. The scandalous among the Clergy, are certainly, of all Men, the most scandalous; and can scarce be treated with too little Ceremony. An ignorant, prophane, or bigotted Priest, is one of the most despicable Creatures in God's World; and his Cloth, as the Phrase is, is so far from being his Protection or Apology for his Misdemeanours, that it certainly aggravates his Guilt, and rarely fails to expose him to greater and more just Contempt.

I expect to be told, that, bad as he is, he may preach good and wholesome Doctrine. Yes, so he may; and, for ought I know, so may the Devil himself; for, it seems, he can turn himself into an Angel of Light, and, upon Occasions, can quote the Scriptures, and argue from them: But who, for all that, would choose him for his Teacher? *Avaritiam accusare potest & latro*, said one of those venerable Men we call Fathers\*.---- But he must not only speak what he does not believe, but all he says must come from him with an ill Grace; and all that know his Character must despise him in their Hearts, and hear him with Prejudice.

I have sometimes wonder'd that Chrysostom, a Man of singular Piety, and one of the most eloquent Preachers of his Time, should be so respectful to the looser Clergy, as, in several of his Homilies, to caution the People against despising them for their Wickedness: For, supposing their Offences publick, and of the grosser sort, (which; -I take it; ~~was the Case~~) the Contempt cautioned against was not only just but unavoidable.-- He never indeed omits to put these Wretches in mind of the Dignity and Design of their Calling; and, with his usual Spirit and Elegancy, to set forth the Obligations they were under to Sanctity and Strictness of Life; representing it as a woful Prostitution of their Cha-

\* Jerom,



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*Character, to abandon themselves to Ease and Pleasure and worldly Affairs, to the Neglect of the Duties of their Office: But yet he as often tells the People, they should not shun hearing them, provided their Doctrine was sound; and that the ill Examples of their Lives should not offend them against their Instructions: For, says he, God may employ wicked Men, as he did Judas and Balaam, in his own Work. --- But what does all this tend to, but to make Men believe they must wink at the Wickedness of their Teachers, and still reverence them as the Ministers of Christ, tho' all their other Conduct shews they are in the Interest of another Master.*

*But the most remarkable and extravagant Instance of Connivance at the Vices of the Clergy, is Theodoret's Story of Constantine the Great, at the Synod of Nice. Complaints being made to him against certain Bishops and Ministers, on account of their Immoralities, the good Emperor would not so much as suffer the Libels, that contain'd them, to be read; but, tying them up in a Bundle, clapped his own Signet upon them, and ordered them to be safely kept. As soon as the Business of the Synod was over, he called for the Papers, and first taking an Oath that he knew not a Tittle of what was in them, committed them to the Flames before their Eyes; declaring, That the Crimes of Priests should not be divulged, lest the Publication of them should embolden others to be as wicked as themselves. To which, 'tis said, he added, That, if he saw a Bishop in the very Act of ~~Adultery a~~ *Crime that shall be nameless in English*, he would cast his Purple over him, that no body else might be Witness to the shameless Action. Superabundantly tender! I must confess; but whether to reckon it among the Virtues or Weaknesses of this great Man, I leave to the Reader. Some, I doubt not, would give it the pompous*

+ Alienum torum labefactantem, obtesturum Paludamento sceleratum facinus, &c. Theod. Hist. Eccles. Lib. I. Cap. II.

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*pompous Name of Charity: But, if Charity must be the Name of it, one cannot forbear saying, with some Amazement, O Emperor, great is thy Charity! Such Connivance, the vicious will always be glad of, because they need it: But whether it be consistent with the Interest of Religion and good Discipline, is no hard Matter to determine. I add, that if the Clergy behave so as to need such Indulgence, I think the World would be better without them than with them.*

*If it be urged, that our Saviour commanded even his own Disciples to attend the publick Teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees, notwithstanding he knew them to be, to the last Degree, corrupt, both in Doctrine and Morals §. I answer, whoever will consider our Saviour's whole Discourse, and what he says of these very Men elsewhere, will easily see, that nothing was farther from his Design, than that his Disciples should look upon them as safe Guides. Does he not bid them beware of the Leaven, i. e. the Doctrine of the Pharisees? Does he not say, that they taught for Doctrines the Commandments of Men, and rendered the Law of God of none Effect by their Traditions? And, in this very Chapter, how many Woes does he denounce against them; and how often does he call them Hypocrites, Fools, and blind Guides; telling them, that they shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against others, and prostituted Religion to serve their worldly Designs? Nay worse, they made those, whom they had taken infinite Pains to proselyte to their Religion, two-fold more the Children of Hell than themselves.*

*How far it may please God to succeed the Ministration of such Men, or whether at all, is, at best, very doubtful. Thus much, however, is certain, that they are very improper Persons for so holy a Function; very unfit to have the Charge of Souls, or to bring Religion into repute: For, what Concern can he be supposed to have about the Virtue of others, who has none*  
him-

*himself? Or, what Care will he take of the Souls of his Flock, who takes none of his own? He may say, and indeed, the very Nature of his Office will oblige him often to say many Things in favour of religious Practice; but they who know the Man, must hear him just as they would hear a Rustic on the Subject of Politeness, or a Coward recommending Courage; that is, with Disgust: Besides, having no true Relish himself, of that which it is his daily Business to inculcate on others, no settled Persuasion of the Importance and Necessity of a religious Life, all his Performances must be jejune and flat, and quite devoid of that Life and Earnestness, which naturally spring from a Heart deeply concern'd to make God's reasonable Creatures wiser, and better, and happier; and the sacred Offices he engages in will be a Burden, rather than a Pleasure to him; an irksome Task, which the Necessity of a Maintenance imposes, rather than a chearful Service principally design'd, and purposely undertaken to promote the noble Ends of Christianity.----But these Things are so well urged in the following Sermon, that it would be needless to repeat them here.*

*After all, it may be proper to declare, there is not the least Intention to insinuate any thing to the Disadvantage of Ministers in general. It is allowed, that so far as they discharge their Office with Faithfulness, they are a very useful Body of Men, and can scarce be too much encouraged or respected: Nor should the World be too severe in censuring their Conduct, tho' they are not always above the Infirmities of Men, nor even the Imputation, sometimes, of what may properly be called Faults. We look in vain for perfect Characters here below: The very Teachers of Virtue themselves come short of their own Rules; and I believe it would not be an Excess of Modesty, even in the best of them, to own with the humble WATTS, "I often stand corrected in my own Discourses."----If therefore, being, in other respects, qualified, they are in-*  
*offen-*



*offensive and regular, they may be borne with; and if conspicuously good and exemplary, they are worthy of double Honour.*

*However, let me beg of all not to be too hasty in taking up Prejudices against them; at least, to do them this Piece of common Justice, never to reproach them without Reason and Evidence, never to condemn them by the Lump, nor to impute to the whole Order the Faults and Miscarriages of a disgraceful few. Let every Man bear his own Burden. Let not the real or pretended Faults of Individuals be charged upon the Whole. Exceptions there are; and they ought to be made. He that deals not thus with them, acts an unrighteous Part; and, I add, a very weak and simple Part: For, according to the same Method of proceeding, 'tis an easy Matter to prove him either Knave or Fool, or any thing one likes. It is but to shew there are such Characters in his Profession, and the Work is done.*

*This Sermon, I doubt not, will meet with the Acceptance it deserves. It is dedicated to Religion and Virtue; and addressed particularly to those, whose peculiar Office it is to serve in the Cause of Virtue. It is the Composition of one, who has justly acquired a considerable Reputation, as a Preacher, and whose Probity and good Sense recommend him to the Esteem of many. I verily believe the Interest of Religion lies near his Heart, and that it would be his greatest Pleasure to see its Power and Influence more extensive. If what is here published conduces to this good Purpose, the Author will have his End; and it will give him no great Uneasiness to bear the invidious and ill-natur'd Reflections of MEAN AND NARROW SPIRITS.*

DURHAM, Sept. 26.

1743.

THO. WALKER.






A

# S E R M O N, &c.

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ROMANS ii. 21.

*Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest  
thou not thyself? —*

 AMONG all the Solecisms in the Moral World, none is more gross than an immoral Teacher. A Preacher of *Virtue*, a Practiser of *Vice*! No Character more odious in the Sight of God; no Character more justly detested by good Men. Nothing has a more malignant Influence on Religion, to bring it into Contempt, and to hinder the Progress of it. This appears sufficiently evident from the vicious Teachers among the *Jews*; particularly in the Instance of *Eli's* Sons. *The Sin of the young Men was very great before the Lord; for, on account of it, Men abhorred the Offering of the Lord\**. To such Teachers the Apostle, in my Text, directs himself; reproaching them with the monstrous Absurdity of their Conduct. Their *Practice* was utterly inconsistent with their *Profession*. In *Words* they pleaded for *Virtue*; in *Works* they were Advocates for *Vice*! They pressed

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\* 1 Sam. ii. 17

Religion on *others*, while they *themselves* were openly prophane, and scandalously wicked.

And, was this the Fault of the *Jewish* Rabbies only? Is the *Christian* Priesthood clear in this Matter? Have there not been, are there not still, some bad Men in the sacred Office? Alas! the Force of Truth, and the sad Experience of former Ages, will extort a Confession. They were not the *Jewish* Scribes alone, whose Works were inconsistent with their Doctrine. They were not the Heathen *Moralists* only, who taught one thing, and lived another. Too many *Preachers* of the Gospel help to keep them in Countenance; while their private Life is a Contradiction to their publick Lessons. Nay, must not even the best of us blush, and acknowledge our Defects, that we have not lived up to the Purity and Strictness of those Rules we inculcate on others? We may all remember our *Faults this Day*; and, in some Sense, apply to ourselves the Apostle's Reproof: *Thou which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?* These Words will, I hope, suggest something instructive and useful to each of us.

The Place where I now stand; the Cause I am pleading, *viz.* that of Religion and Virtue; the good End I have in view, *viz.* the Credit and Usefulness of a Gospel Ministry, will be my Apology, while I prosecute my Subject in the following Method:

I. *I shall consider that Part of a Minister's Character, by which he is described a Teacher of others.*

II. *Demonstrate, that, in order to fulfil this Part of the sacred Office, it is necessary a Minister be a good Man, and a good Christian. He who would effectually teach others Religion and Goodness, must be religious and good himself.*

III. *Point out some of the ill Consequences of a*  
Man's

*Man's assuming the Office of a Publick Teacher, who has not first taught himself.*

IV. *Conclude with a few practical Reflections.*

I. *I am to consider that Part of a Minister's Character, by which he is described a Teacher of others.* The Doctors and Priests among the Jews were the publick Instructors of the People; Teachers of others; Pastors to feed them with Wisdom and Understanding in the Fear of the Lord\*. In this respect their Office was the same with that of Gospel Ministers. The great Author of our Religion was a Teacher sent from God†. Ministers bear the same Character in Subordination to him. This is the Description given of them in many Places of the New Testament§. The Word, then, seems but ill applied by those, who affect to fix it upon us, as a diminutive Name, if not a Term of Reproach. Far be it from us, however, to be ashamed of a Name, which our Saviour and his Apostles bore before us. It is our great Ambition to answer the Import of it. It is, indeed, no small Part of our Work to instruct others. Hereby we endeavour to banish Ignorance and Immorality out of the World; and consequently, to answer the End of a Gospel Ministry.

Here it will not be improper to observe, what ought to be the Subject of our sacred Lectures; and what Advice this *View* of our Character suggests.

As to the Subject of our sacred Lectures, the Things we ought to teach others, they are Matters of the greatest Moment; Matters wherein the Glory of God and the Good of Mankind are nearly concerned, the whole *Counsel*, and revealed Will of God to Men. The Salvation of others, our own eternal Happiness, is the glorious Mark which the Apostle

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teaches

\* Jerem. iii. 15. † John iii. 2. § Matth. xxviii. 18. 1 Cor. xii. 28. Gal. vi. 6. Eph. iv. 11. 1 Tim. iii. 2.



teaches us to have constantly in view, *to save ourselves, and them that hear us* ||. To this all our Lessons should be directed. Nothing, which may promote this great End, must be omitted.

We are not to perplex our Hearers with metaphysical Controversies, and doubtful Opinions, *Questions and Strifes of Words* \*. It will signify little to fill their Heads with abstruse Speculations, or to amuse them with an Affectation of Learning, with Flowers of Rhetorick, and Points of Wit. It will signify yet less to inspire them with Bigotry, and attach them to a Party.-----We must labour to refine the Heart, and mend the Life, by inculcating the fundamental Truths of the Divine Existence, Perfections and Providence; the Doctrine of Christ's Mediation, a general Judgment, and a future State of Rewards and Punishments. We must warmly recommend all the Graces of the Divine Spirit, and press all the Duties of the Christian Life. We should teach Men a pious Regard to the *Supreme Being*. In this we must be the more diligent, in regard we live in an Age, when Piety and Devotion are generally fallen into Disrepute. Many, in our Day, decry Piety, as much as they would *seem* to magnify the social Virtues. They readily allow, Men ought to honour their Parents, and obey their Prince; but, most absurdly, imagine, that no Respect is due to infinite Perfections; as if the Relations between God and his Creatures were not as real and obliging as the Relations between one Creature and another.----We should teach others the Practice of strict Justice and extensive Charity, a Readiness and Pleasure in doing Good. We should urge the Necessity of a regular *Self-government*, Temperance and Moderation; Purity and Chastity, Meekness and Humility, Patience and Forgiveness, Mortification and Self-denial. We should set Vice before them in its proper

|| 1 Tim. iv. 16.

\* 1 Tim. vi. 4.



per Colours, exposing its odious Nature and fatal Effects. ---- In short, we must teach others all Things that are *just and honest, grave and decent, lovely and of good Report*; pressing them *to abound in all these Fruits of Righteousness*; charging them *to be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect*; and *to be holy, as he who hath called them is holy*.

Such are the Lessons Ministers ought to teach; and when they are described *Teachers of others*, it speaks the Necessity of their having a tolerable *Genius* and Capacity, with a competent Measure of true Learning. One, who would teach others to be religious, must have a clear and distinct Notion of Religion himself. He must be well acquainted with the Scriptures, as well as with the great Principles of natural Religion. He should understand the Rules of Reasoning, and have some tolerable Acquaintance with the Make and Frame of the human Mind; that he may know all the Avenues to the Soul, and be able to apply himself, with Address, to inform the Judgment, and touch the Heart. Further,

This *View* of the Ministerial Office suggests, that *Humility* is a necessary Qualification for a right Discharge of it. Pride and Haughtiness ill become a *Teacher*. He must behave with Meekness and Condescension to *the ignorant, and them who are out of the Way*. He must stoop to the meanest, and most servile Part of his Duty. He must not think it unworthy a Man of his Parts to instruct the poorest of his Flock; to form the Minds, even of *Babes*, in Religion; and to converse with the most vicious, for their Reformation. Our blessed Saviour came into the World, *not to be ministered unto, but to minister* \*. He came a *Physician to cure the sick; to call Sinners to Repentance* †. He stooped to the lowest, and conversed with the worst. *The Disciple, sure, is not above his Lord* §. We should *preach ourselves*  
*Servants*

\* Matth. xx. 28. † Matth. ix. 12, 13. § Matth. x. 24.

*Servants of the meanest among our People, for Jesus's Sake* ||.

This Description of a Minister imports the hard *Labour* and Pains attending the sacred Office. *Teachers* of others are *Workmen* and *Labourers*. Indeed their Task is often very tiresome. They must encounter much Opposition from the Dulness, Inattention, and Perverseness of their Scholars. So great are the Difficulties and Discouragements attending this Work, that we may hear, even an *Apostle*, crying out, *Who is sufficient for these Things* \* ? The Labour of this Service is represented by the irksome Toils of a *Shepherd*, and the solicitous Care of a *Watchman*: It is figured by the indefatigable and uninterrupted Pains of a *Husbandman*, digging and sowing, planting and watering, cutting down and reaping.-----The Spiritual Teacher must not indulge Sloth, and loll at Ease; *eating the Fat, and cloathing himself with the Wooll, while he feeds not the Flock* †. Private Studies, publick Ministrations, visiting the Sick, teaching from House to House, exhorting, rebuking, and comforting our People, as their Circumstances require: These are Duties which will furnish Work sufficient to employ our whole Time, and wear out our whole Strength.

As we are *Teachers* of others, we ought to study great *Plainness*; to come down to the Level, and adapt ourselves to the Capacities of our Hearers. Religion, indeed, is a very plain and intelligible Thing; and yet how strangely has it been darkened and obscured! How wretchedly has it been misrepresented and disguised by some Teachers, who have departed from the *Simplicity* of the Gospel! Sometimes we find Christianity dwindled into mere *Form*, and external *Ceremony*: By others it is resolved into Metaphysical *Jargon*, and dark Mystery. In one Place, it puts on the Air of a gloomy *Enthusiast*; and

|| 2 Cor. iv. 5. \* 2 Cor. ii. 16. † Ezek. xxxiv. 3.

and in another, degenerates into angry *Zeal*, and bitter *Contention*.----Some of these Teachers, 'tis evident, have never understood Christianity themselves: Others have preached *themselves* and not *Christ*: They have courted the Applause and Admiration of People, more than their Profit and Edification.----Nothing is more necessary in a *Teacher*, than Plainness, Perspicuity, and Simplicity. All Affectation, either of Sentiment or Language, is to be avoided: It ill suits the Gravity and Importance of religious Subjects.-----A *Teacher* should, in a manner, forget himself; he should have no other View but to instruct, and persuade, those who sit listening to his Doctrine. Further,

This *View* of the Ministerial Character gives a Check to an *imposing* Spirit, and *Magisterial* Airs. It cannot be denied, that, to be ever dictating to others, without any Reply; to be generally teaching, and seldom, or never, hearing, is apt to affect the Temper, and beget an imperious and assuming Habit. And this, perhaps, is one Reason why the Clergy have been often so proud, so impatient of Contradiction, and intractable. But this is greatly to mistake the Nature of our Office. We are *Teachers*, and not *Lords over God's Heritage* \*. We are *Leaders*, 'tis true; but we must not lead People *blindfold*. We should first inform the Judgment, and then persuade the Will. We have *no Dominion over the Faith of our People* †. We have no Authority to *force* or *compel*, or to propagate Religion by any other Methods than these practised by Christ and his Apostles, the first and best *Teachers* of our holy Religion. I shall only add on this Argument,

That the *Light*, in which we are considering the Ministerial Office, points out the absolute Necessity of real Religion and Goodness in all who would  
aspire

\* 1 Pet. v. 3.

† 2 Cor. i. 24.

aspire after it. And this brings me directly to the second general Head in the Method, *viz.*

II. *To demonstrate, that, in order to teach others effectually, one must first teach himself; in order to be a good Minister, a Man must be a good Man, and a good Christian.* To evince this, let us consider,

*First,* That an inward Principle of Religion and Goodness will make a Man faithful, courageous, and zealous, in declaring the *whole Counsel of God*. The *good Teacher* knows that he is but a Steward; and therefore must be faithful. *He watches as one that must give an Account* \*. He keeps nothing back which may be profitable to those he teaches †. He *speaks sincerely, as in the Sight of God* §. He is bold as a Lion, in the Cause of Truth and Virtue. He dares oppose fashionable Errors, and tell Sinners the most unwelcome Truths. He preaches not to please, but to profit. He is not daunted by Dangers, nor intimidated by Death, so as to deny or conceal any important and necessary Doctrine.---The truly *religious Teacher* is animated by a noble Principle of Zeal for the Honour of God, and a generous Concern for the Good of Mankind. These are powerful Motives to Fidelity and Diligence. Such a one, and indeed none but such, is qualified to teach others.

If a Man of an opposite Character gets into the Ministry, he wants *Grace to be faithful*. He is influenced by low and selfish Ends. He is scrambling for Wealth; he is courting Fame; he is aspiring after Dignities and Preferments, and thinks any Means lawful that may help to compass his sordid Designs. He is a *Pleaser of Men*; and therefore cannot be a *Servant of Christ* ||. His Mind is scarce free and unbiassed enough to form a just Notion of Religion; or, if he doth, he has not Courage and Firmness enough to become a Confessor, or Martyr for it. He dares  
not

\* Heb. xiii. 17. † Acts xx. 29, § 2 Cor. ii. 17. || Gal. i. 10.



not speak the Truth, for fear of offending his Friends, and losing his Popularity. Did he appear open and undisguised, he would give Umbrage to Men in Power; he would forfeit the Prospect of such a *Place*, or *Favour*, he is greedily expecting.---He has no Idea of a disinterested Charity and Publick Spirit. His narrow Breast; his little and unbenevolent Soul, wrapt up in itself, will not permit him to go one Step out of his Way, or be at the least Pains to advance the temporal Interest, or even the eternal Salvation of his Fellow Creatures. He is quite a Stoick as to what befalls others. Nothing engages his Attention; nothing affects him either with Pleasure or Pain, but what terminates in his own dear *Self*. Will a Man of this Character ever submit to the Labour of teaching others?

*Secondly*, Personal Religion in a *Teacher* will make his Work easy and agreeable to *himself*. So amiable is Virtue in his Eye; so strong is his Affection to Religion, that he takes *Pleasure* to advance its Interest. This gives Life and Wings to his Endeavours. His Toil is his *Delight*; and his Work, in a great Measure, its own *Reward*. He has a *Genius*, a Taste, and Turn of Mind for it; and therefore 'tis easy. He rejoices to see Religion and Piety flourish; especially when this happens by his Means. He thinks no Labour too great to purchase this Honour.---So sincere his Charity; so hearty his Benevolence to Mankind, that, with the greatest Chearfulness, he submits to the meanest Office, the most toilsome Service, to promote their Worth and Welfare. To gain Profelytes to Virtue; to bring-home wandering Sheep; to save *Souls* from Death; to assist his Fellow Christians in their Warfare, and carry them with him to the Mansions of Bliss: How delightful this Work to the good Minister! How divine! How God-like doth he esteem it! His Heart is set upon it. It is his *Meat and his Drink* to accomplish it.

B

---Thus,

----Thus, he *finishes his Course, and fulfills his Ministry with Joy and Satisfaction to himself* \*.

On the contrary, if we suppose a *vicious* Man invested with the sacred Character; he is always wearing a Mask, and acting a Part: And how unnatural must this be? The Ministerial Work is to him an insupportable *Burden*, a tedious *Service*, an irksome *Task*. He has no Heart to it; no Relish in it. He is teaching others what he doth not believe himself. He is recommending to others what he dislikes himself. He *speaks* Sentiments which he never *felt*. Now, can there be any thing free, natural, or easy in all this? No Wonder if *such* a Teacher drive on heavily, without Heart, Life, or Vigour in his Work. What Pleasure; what Enjoyment can he have in Life? For his own sake then, for the sake of present *Enjoyment*, was there no higher Motive, he should become what he professes, a good *Man*, and a good *Christian*: Or, at least, he should resign the Office of *teaching others* to one who has a Genius for it, and can perform the Service with more Ease to himself, as well as with more Advantage to others.

*Thirdly*, The religious Disposition in a Teacher is the most probable Mean of gaining *Success* to his Labours. The pious Temper, and exemplary Life, will add *Beauty* and *Weight* to his Instructions; and consequently dispose others to receive them. His regular Practice is like one continued Sermon. Here we may find transcribed all the amiable Graces and divine Virtues of that holy Religion, which he recommends to others. His Example makes Way for his Doctrine, and is a practical Commentary upon it.----He bears a Part of that *Burden* he would lay upon others. This convinces them that he is in Earnest, and speaks from the *Heart*; and therefore what he says finds the easier Access to *their Hearts*.  
When

\* Acts xx. 24.

When People see their Teacher choose for himself that very *Course* which he marks out for them; when they observe him performing those very Duties which he presses on *others*, they are naturally prepossessed with an Opinion of his Friendship for them; and, at the same Time, conceive a favourable Opinion of that Religion which he recommends. The Character of the Teacher goes a great Way to recommend *any* Doctrine or Practice. The greater Part of Mankind regard an Advice, just in Proportion to the Opinion they have of him who gives it. --- When a Minister goes before his People in the Paths of Piety, Charity, and Righteousness, it is more likely they will follow him.

On the other hand, there is little Probability, that the best Instructions from a *bad* Man will make any deep Impressions, or produce any good Effect. His ill Life creates a strong Prejudice against all he says. He disagrees with his own Character. Cowardice in a *Soldier* is not more indecent than Vice in a *Teacher*. His Practice gives the Lie to his Discourses. When he recommends Religion with the greatest *seeming* Warmth, his Sincerity is justly question'd; since his Actions are a plain Contradiction to that Religion: For a Man's Actions will always pass for the most genuine Interpretation of his inward Sentiments. --- What Good can the *vicious* Minister possibly do? He pulls down by his *Example* faster, than he can build up by his *Doctrine*. --- Will ever any Man pretend to teach another, when he cannot teach himself? Can he *give* to another, what he *hath* not himself? Indeed we should begin at home, and try our Art of Teaching upon ourselves: If it be useless here, it is not likely to succeed much better elsewhere.

With what Face will a Man declaim against *Vices*, of which he himself is notoriously guilty? With what Grace can he recommend *Duties* and *Virtues*, to the Practice of which he himself is an utter

Stranger? Is there any thing more ridiculous, than to hear a *Drunkard* pronouncing an affected Harangue against *Drunkennes*? or a *Swearer* against *Prophaneness*? With what Assurance can the known *Liar* condemn *Falshood*? or the officious *Tale-bearer*, and *Slanderer*, reprove *Calumny*? Can such a Rebuke produce any other Effect, than the severe and bitter Sarcasm, *Physician heal thyself: Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself*? Suppose an artful *Hypocrite*, from the Pulpit, should preach up *Sincerity*; or a *fiery Bigot*, *Moderation*: Suppose a covetous *Miser* should preach up *Generosity*, or a *selfish Man*, whose contracted Soul never knew what it is to *weep with them that weep*, or to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, should recommend Acts of *Charity*, *Friendship*, and *Sympathy*: Imagine a crafty *Cheat*, in the publick Assembly, extolling *Justice* and *Honesty*; can there possibly be a greater Absurdity? What Success can such Preachers reasonably propose? All who know their Character will certainly despise them; and many will think worse of their Doctrine for *their* Sake. Their known Practice speaks more forcibly *one Way*, than all their Arguments the *other*.----Whether, may we imagine, could have recommended Compassion and Mercy with more Success, the disdainful *Priest*, who turned away his Eyes from the poor Man in Distress, or the tender-hearted *Samaritan*, who *poured Wine and Oil into his Wounds, and took Care of him* \*?

I might add on this Head, that the *good Man* only can expect the Divine *Blessing* to second his Endeavours. This is absolutely necessary to gain Success. *Paul planteth, and Apollos watereth, but God, by his Blessing, gives the Increase* †. The Blessing of God attends the religious Man, to *establish the Work of his Hands, to prosper him in all that he setteth his Hand unto* §. ---- But this is a Privilege the vicious Man has no Right to claim. He can neither expect the  
Grace

\* Luke x. 33, 34. † 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. § Dent. xxviii. 8.



Grace of God to assist him in his Work, nor the *Blessing* of God to accompany it ; and therefore he cannot propose to teach others with any remarkable Success.

By this Time, I hope, it is evident, that *personal Religion* is necessary to qualify a Man for being a good Minister. I proceed,

III. *To point out some of the ill Consequences of a Man's assuming the Office of a Publick Teacher, who has not first taught himself.*----Indeed there is a numberless Train of fatal Evils attending this absurd and inconsistent Conduct. Particularly, *First*, The Name of God is blasphemed, and Religion suffers : And can we imagine a greater Evil ? Gospel Ministers are, in a peculiar Sense, the *Servants* of God ; *Ambassadors*, or *Messengers*, to treat with Men about their Peace and Reconciliation with Heaven. Their Office is sacred. Vice and Irregularities in them, reflect Dishonour upon their Master, and Shame upon their Office. This has been the Parent of *Atheism* in the World ; and occasions many hard Speeches and blasphemous Reproaches against the *Almighty*. If Ministers, notwithstanding their *Boast of the Law*, and their pressing the Observance of it on others, *break this Law themselves, they dishonour God, and cause his Name to be blasphemed among the Wicked and Unbelievers* \*.

Nothing has, nothing can have, a worse Influence on Religion, than *Immoralities* in the Clergy. We have already observed how improbable it is that a *bad* Man should teach *Goodness*, with any remarkable Success. Religion is never like to thrive in such Hands. Even the Cause of *Piety* and *Virtue*, tho' the *best* in the World, must suffer, when managed by such a *bad* Advocate.----So far is the scandalous Teacher from *promoting* the great End of his Office, that he *binds* it. So far is he from doing Good, that he does a World of Mischief. Instead of a  
Re-

\* Rom. .ii. 23, 24.

*Reformer*, he is a *Corrupter* of Mankind. He is the greatest *Enemy of the Cross of Christ*. He gives the deepest Wound to Religion, and brings it into the utmost Contempt. He secretly betrays the Cause, which he openly professes to maintain. His Conduct is a monstrous Absurdity. How irreconcilable is an *holy Calling*, and an *infamous Life*! To see a *vicious* Man declaiming publicly in the Cause of *Virtue*; to hear an *irreligious* Man gravely recommending *Religion*; what will the World think? Will they not be ready to say, "Virtue is but a *Name*; Religion is but a *Farce*; the Man speaks only for Hire. Come, let us not believe him, since, it is manifest, he believes not himself." I will not pretend to justify such Reasoning; but, I ask, is it not often used? and may it not be generally expected from the *superficial Thinkers* among Mankind, who are, by far, the greater Part.

*Secondly*, When a bad Man assumes the Office of teaching others, it is attended with Consequences most *pernicious* and *fatal* to the Souls of Men. Ministers are Men looked at, and narrowly observed. Their Example is often proposed as a *Copy* and Rule of Life; and therefore, their bad Practice diffuses a general malignant Influence. The Contagion of their Example poisons Numbers. It confirms the *Infidel* in his Unbelief, and gives the prophane *Scoffer* a specious Handle to laugh at every thing that is sacred. It hardens and encourages the ill Man in his wicked Practices. He seeks no better Plea, than the Example of his Teacher. This quiets his Conscience, and stifles Remorse. This extinguishes Shame, and keeps him in Countenance.----The common Apology in the Mouth of such Ministers, "Do as I say, but not as I do," has but little Weight; and indeed, no Wonder, for it scarce carries an Air of Seriousness.

The vicious Minister is not unlike the hypocritical  
*Scribes*

*Scribes and Pharisees.* He *shuts up the Kingdom of Heaven against others*; and will neither go in himself, nor suffer them that are entering to go in \*. He leads Numbers astray, and causes them to err. He is not content to perish alone: A Multitude must attend him to the Place of Torment, in the other World.

Thus, an immoral Teacher is the most *injurious* Man; a *Wolf in Sheeps Cloathing*. He injures the best Interests of his Fellow Creatures, and stains his Hands with the Blood of *Souls*. He lays a Stumbling-block in their Way, upon which they fall, and suffer the Loss, both of Virtue and of Happiness.----The human Soul is one of the noblest *Works* of God. It surpasses, in Dignity and Value, a whole *World*, as our Saviour observes ‖. It is the Charge of Angels, the Care of Christ, and of God. To promote the Worth and Happiness of *Souls*, is, therefore, the most Divine and God-like Employment. On the contrary, to betray them into Sin; to wound their Innocence, or forfeit their Happiness, is cruel and inhumane. It is to act like the Devil, and join in Confederacy with Hell.

*Thirdly*, Vice in a Teacher is extremely dangerous to *himself*. Wickedness is, indeed, dangerous to every Man who commits it; but especially so to a *Minister*. Vice, in him, is attended with all possible *Aggravations*, with the highest *Guilt*; consequently, it is big with the greatest *Misery*, and exposes to the severest Punishment. If a Teacher be a bad Man, he must be *extremely* bad. His Wickedness rises to the highest Pitch. He *knows his Master's Will, and yet acts contrary to it*. He is the greatest Hypocrite; and how dreadful will be the Fate of Hypocrites! Our Saviour makes it the Measure and Standard of the most terrible Misery †. The Sins of an immoral Teacher carry in them a deliberate Contempt of all those *Truths* and *Obligations* of Religion, which  
he

\* Matth. xxiii. 13. ‖ Chap. xvi. 26. † Chap. xxiv. 51.



he is daily recommending to others. He must be a mere Infidel, or he cannot miss to have many uneasy Reflections. He must be strangely hardened, if he be insensible of those Vices in *himself*, which he is constantly reproving in *others*: And he must be wretchedly blind, if he sees not that Misery coming upon his *own Head*, which he is daily denouncing against *others*.---It will enhance his Misery, that he knew the *Way* to Happiness, and yet would not walk in it; that he pointed out this Way to others, and missed it himself. He offered Salvation to them, and rejected it himself. While he *preaches the Gospel to others, he himself is a Cast-away*†.

It is but a small Matter to add, after this, that the vicious Teacher is, of all Mankind, the most *despicable*. If he teaches others right, he teaches them to have an Abhorrence of his Practice; and, consequently, a mean Opinion of his Person. In Fact, no Man is more generally, and, indeed, no Man is more justly, despised.---I grant, a bad Minister, by avoiding the gross and scandalous Vices, and paying some Regard to an external Character, may possibly secure himself from great Contempt in the World. But is his inward real *Character* a whit the more beautiful? Is he not still odious in the Sight of *God*? And, indeed, it is ten to one, but his concealed Wickedness will, some Time or other, appear; in which Case he will meet with Reproach enough from *Men*. At least, as his *seeming* Goodness will be far from answering the high Idea, which the World has generally form'd of a Minister's Virtue; he can never expect to have a *very good* Character. If he be not utterly *despised*, he is not much *respected*, while he lives: If he be not absolutely *bated*, he is but little *lamented*, when he dies.---The *selfish* Principle then, a Regard to his own Interest, should induce a Minister to be a  
good

good Man. By no other Means can he avoid Contempt in this World, and secure himself from Misery, an high Degree of Misery in the next.

These are some of the ill Consequences of a bad Man's assuming the Office of a Publick Teacher; Evils so great, that the bare naming of them is enough to strike us with Horror.

IV. *I shall now conclude my Subject with a few practical Reflections.*

First, Let us, my Brethren, whose Office obliges us to be Teachers of others, take Care, in the first Place, to teach ourselves. Let us not be found always abroad, giving Advice to others: Sometimes let us dwell at home, and inspect our own Behaviour. If our Lessons be good, we should practise them ourselves. We must not imagine, that, because we have the Charge of others, we may neglect ourselves. We must take Care to save our own Souls, as well as the Souls of our Hearers. Charity, in this Case, ought to begin at home: By performing this Duty to ourselves, we will become the more capable to discharge what is due to others.

Here I shall beg Leave to recommend the following Lessons, first to myself, and then to my Brethren.

It concerns us to form a just Idea of the great Importance of the Ministerial Office. We should consider it in a very different Light from any secular Occupation. We greatly mistake the Nature of our Office, if we have no higher Notion of it, than as a Trade, or Way of living; a mere Employment to get Bread, and a comfortable Subsistence to our Families. There is something of infinitely greater Moment here. We should be influenced by higher Motives, and aim at a much nobler Mark. To recover Mankind from a State of Ignorance and Corruption; to be Leaders of their Devotions; to be Patterns of good Works; to make the World see the Beauty, and feel the commanding Force of Virtue; to advance

vance the best Interests of our Fellow-creatures, their true Worth and Goodness here, and their Perfection and eternal Happiness hereafter; to train up rational Creatures for a future State, and prepare immortal Souls for the Enjoyment of endless Bliss: This is the important Business of a Gospel Minister.----This just Idea of the Nature and Design of our Office will restrain us from doing a mean Thing, unworthy of it; and make us perform all the sacred Duties with a becoming Decency and Seriousness.

Let us learn to live above the Influence of a slavish *Popularity*. To be always affecting Commendation, and courting Applause, is a Conduct far below a Man of Wisdom and Spirit. The *Humour* of People is so variable and uncertain, that it would be *vain*, was it not *sinful*, to make it a Rule. We should study to *please* others *for their Good to Edification*\*. ---- I am sensible, my Brethren, that our Situation is attended with Disadvantages. Our whole Dependence is upon the People; and therefore we are under the stronger Temptations to pay an undue Regard to their Inclinations. But, even in this respect, we are in no worse Circumstances than the *Apostles*, and first Teachers of Christianity. Let us imitate their Example, and not be awed by the Frowns of Men, or allured by their Favours, to violate our Duty. A good Conscience is too dear a Price, to purchase the most valuable temporal Enjoyment. The Acclamations of the World are not sufficient to balance the Censures of God, and the Reproaches of our own Conscience. Besides, *he who walketh uprightly*, even in this respect, *walketh surely*†. He seldom misses Esteem from the wiser and better Part of Mankind, whose Judgment deserves to be most regarded: And should any withdraw their Favours, and even *become our Enemies, because we honestly tell them the Truth*§, our Loss will be more than compensated.

\* Rom. xv. 2.

† Prov. x. 9.

§ Gal. iv. 16.



penfated by the prefent Peace of our own Minds,  
and the eternal Reward of the faithful Servant.  
Further,

It will be of infinite Advantage to fix in our  
Minds the deepeft Impreffions of *God* and *divine*  
*Things*, and to have the moft unshaken Belief of the  
*Doctrines* we preach, and the higheft Sense of their  
Importance. This will elevate and exalt our Souls  
above the mean and low Purfuits of this tranfitory  
World. This will be a fovereign Antidote againft  
the Snares of Life; a fecure Defence againft all  
Temptations arifing from the Grandeur and Pomp,  
the Wealth and Riches, the Pleafures and Amufe-  
ments of this vain and delufive Scene of Things.  
Hereby we will be enabled to diftinguifh the *true*  
from the *false* Enjoyments of Life. Such Faith,  
and fuch Impreffions, will make us behold, with  
Pity and Concern, the Ignorance and Folly of the  
Generality around us; while they love with fo much  
Ardour, and purfue with fo much Keennefs, Things  
that can never make them happy, mere *Dreams*,  
*airy Phantoms*. This will infpire us with a laudable  
Zeal to remove their Prejudices, and convince them,  
that the folid Happinefs of Life arifes from a religi-  
ous Source; from *being good*, and *doing good*; from  
a Confciousnefs of the divine Favour, and the glo-  
rious Profppect of a bleffed Immortality. I add,

It will be of great Ufe to acquire a ftrong Affec-  
tion to *Virtue*, and a high Relifh of religious Plea-  
fures. We fhould place Virtue in a true Light, and  
often contemplate its native Beauty and ravifhing  
Charms, together with all the happy Fruits and Ef-  
fects of a religious Temper and Life. We fhould  
carefully view the Equity and Goodnefs of the di-  
vine Laws, the Peace of a good Confcience, and  
the *Pleasantnefs of Wifdom's Ways*, the prefent Gain  
and future Reward of *Godlinefs*. This can fcarce  
mifs to attract our Affections; to command our

Esteem, and increase our Love to Religion: And this strong Affection will make us unwearied, diligent, and zealous, to promote the Interest of Religion; to display its Glory, and make others feel its Force. Further,

It concerns us to possess a most sincere and generous *Good-will* to Mankind. We cannot be at too great Pains to cultivate and improve this amiable, this important Temper of Mind. To this Purpose, we should consider Mankind in all their various *Relations*, and most endearing *Views*, as Children of the same Almighty *Parent*, united to us by the Ties of one common Nature; as Fellow-sufferers, involved in the same Calamities, and struggling with the same Difficulties; as Fellow-travellers in a strange Country; Pilgrims journeying to the same invisible World. All Christians are united by stricter Bonds. We should look upon them as our *Brethren*; as Fellow-soldiers, fighting under the same Captain; as Members of the same mystical Body, and Heirs of the same blessed Hope; Citizens of the same heavenly *Jerusalem*, who will spend an Eternity in one happy Community. The *People* of our respective Congregations are still more nearly allied to us. They are so many Persons committed to our Charge, depending upon us for Instruction and Direction, Assistance and Comfort.---Such Reflections, such Views of Mankind, will extinguish that little *Selfishness*, that *Contraction*, and *Meanness* of Soul, so unworthy a *Man*, a *Christian*, and especially a *Minister*: They will open our Hearts, and present our People in the most interesting Light; so that we will spare no Pains to do them good.

In short, we must learn to be really *good* and *religious*. We must not rest in Shew and Affectation; in demure Looks and solemn Airs; we must not rest in improving and adorning an *external* Character; in *seeming to be religious*. We must cultivate and beautify

tify the *inward Man*, the real *Self* within our own Bosom; and *be*, in truth, what we would affect to *appear*. If this be wanting, all other Endowments will signify little; we can never fulfil the great Duties of our sacred and important Office, with Satisfaction to ourselves, or with any great Advantage to others.

*Secondly*, This Subject leads us to one Cause why Christianity has not done more *good*, and the World is not *better*. Nothing is more frequently heard, than tragical Complaints of the *great Corruption of Manners*; *that even Professors of the best Religion are far enough from true Goodness*; *that the Gospel has not effected a general Reformation*; and *that many Christians live worse Lives than some of the sober Heathens*. ----- Indeed it must be allowed, the Observation is as just as it is melancholy. The World is corrupt, and Christians come not up to the Purity of their Profession. But who must answer for all this? Where is the Blame to be charged? Not, sure, on Christianity; for this is a most perfect Scheme, and able to raise Men to a State of Perfection. It will be alledged, perhaps, that *People* are inattentive, intractable, and obstinate. But will this, tho' too true, answer the whole Difficulty? Is this the sole and adequate Cause of the Misfortune? Must not the *Ignorance*, the *Vices*, and *Irregularities* of the Publick Teachers of Religion bear a large Share of the Blame? Indeed it is vain to deny or dissemble the Matter. Deism and Infidelity, so much complained of, may be traced up to this Original. From hence spring strong Prejudices against Religion. To this unhappy Cause may be ascribed much of that bitter Hatred, angry Contention, implacable Malice, and cruel Persecution, which have infested the Christian World. This (*alas! tell it not in Gath*) has often produced the greatest Confusions, the most inhuman Barbarities! Wars and Bloodshed,  
Massacres



Massacres and Murders, Plots and Perjuries, Devastation and Ruin, and the greatest Crimes which were ever committed.----In a Word, *Corruption* generally began among the Clergy; and from them diffused itself through the Body of the Laity. For a Proof of this, did Time permit, I might appeal to History, and lead you back to the Experience of former Ages.----But I must proceed,

*Thirdly*, This Doctrine represents the Evil of introducing a bad Man into the Ministry. To the ill Consequences already mentioned, I shall only add, that a Minister of an immoral Character brings a kind of *Stain* upon the whole Order; and depreciates them in the Esteem of the World, who are often so partial, as to charge the Guilt of a few upon all the rest.----Nothing unfits so much for the sacred Office, as the want of *personal Religion*: A large Share of this, join'd with Prudence, and a moderate Degree of Learning, will make a Man very useful. But the want of Sincerity and Piety is a fundamental Defect; such as no Capacity, or Parts can supply.---A Regard then for the Honour of God, and Credit of Religion; a Regard for the Success of the Gospel, and for the Salvation of immortal Souls, should make us discountenance *bad Men*, and exclude them, as much as possible, from assuming the Office of *teaching* others.

*Fourthly*, It will not be impertinent here, to caution People against thinking worse of *Religion*, because there are some bad Men among the Publick *Teachers* of it. Christianity is so divine and pure a Doctrine, that no *Vice*, either of Professors or Ministers, can corrupt it. *Truth* cannot be defiled by the most polluted *Mouth* which utters it; and therefore should always be equally regarded. It will be a vain Apology to alledge the Irregularities of *bad Teachers*, to excuse our Prejudices against a *good* and *holy Religion*.----It cannot be denied, that those who sit under the  
Ministry

Ministry of an immoral Teacher, labour under considerable Disadvantages, and are exposed to very dangerous Snares. Their Situation is truly unhappy, and deserves Pity. ---- If they can remedy this Evil, doubtless they ought to do it : But, if this be absolutely out of their Power, it concerns them to keep a strict Watch, in Proportion to the Temptations they have to encounter. They should carefully separate the *good Doctrine* from the *ill Practice*; and take heed that the *insinuating* Example of their Teacher does not, by Degrees, lessen their Abhorrence of *Vice*, and create in their Minds Prejudices against *Religion*.

On the other hand, a Minister of a *regular* and *exemplary* Life is a singular Blessing, which demands Thankfulness; a Talent capable of great Improvement, and for which People must give a proportionable Account. *Such* a Teacher deserves all the Respect and Encouragement due to his Character : *Such* an one is an Ornament to his Office, and stands fair to answer the End of it.

In a Word, let *Ministers* behave with that blameless Circumspection, as not to lay a Stumbling-block in the Way of *People*; and let *People* act with so much Reason and Judgment, as not to charge the *Faults* of *Ministers* to the Account of *Religion*. Ministers are but *Men*, Men of like Passions with others; and therefore Infirmities they have, and will have, as long as they are in the present imperfect State. While their *Foibles* rise no higher than the common Weakness and unavoidable Frailties of the human Nature, they challenge Pity, and a charitable Forbearance. It is when their Faults come the Length of *Impiety* and *Insincerity*, or, indeed, of any vicious Habit, sufficient to denominate them *bad Men*; it is then they become intolerable, and disqualified for the *sacred Office*.

Lastly, Since Ministers sustain the Character of  
Teachers;

*Teachers* ; since their Office is an *Institution*, calculated merely for the Good and Edification of People ; it follows that People ought to shew themselves apt Scholars ; that they ought to hear, learn and improve by our publick Instructions. Such Advantages are not to be slighted ; so much *divine Grace is not to be received in vain*.

We have a Right, my Brethren, to require your Attendance on our sacred Lectures ; we have Reason to expect it.---Allow me therefore to call upon you in the Words of our Saviour, *take heed how you hear* \*.

Hear with all *Readiness of Mind* ; with a serious *Attention*, equal to the Importance of religious Subjects, and to your Concern in them. What we teach, at least, what we ought to teach, is the *Doctrine of Salvation*, the *Word of Life*, the *Things which concern your Peace and Welfare* in this World, and your *eternal Happiness* in the next.---This, sure, if any thing, deserves your attentive *Regard*. Further,

You should hear with *Impartiality* and *Judgment*. We have no Pretensions to *Infallibility*, and therefore we demand no slavish Subjection or implicit Faith. *We speak unto wise Men*, and call upon you to *judge what we say* †. Receive no Doctrine upon our bare Word : *Search the Scriptures*, and see with your own Eyes. Believe according to Evidence, and regard Truths according to their Importance. However solicitous we be to advance the Interest of Christianity, we would not bespeak any partial *Regard* even to it. We would not *speak deceitfully for God*. All we desire is only *Justice* ; a fair *Hearing*, a free *Enquiry*, and an equal *Sentence*. If *simple* and *unmixed* Christianity meet with this candid Usage, we are not in the least Pain, either for its *Credit* or *Success*. The heavenly *Seed*, the pure *Word of God*, received

\* Luke viii. 18.

† 1 Cor. ii. 15.



into a judicious and upright Heart, will not fail to produce a plentiful Harvest of good Fruit §.

Another Thing I would recommend to People, is, that they would divest themselves of *Pride* and *Self-conceit*, and hear with *Meekness* and *Humility*. Attend the publick Lectures of Religion with a modest and teachable Disposition: Bring along with you a Sense of your Ignorance; or, at least, a Persuasion, that you need to be frequently *reminded* of your Duty, and to have the Impressions of divine Things fixed deeper. This is what the most judicious and knowing Hearer cannot deny. The best and most perfect Christians on Earth are not got above the Use of *Instruction* and *Exhortation*: They need a *Remembrancer*, even with respect to those *Things which they know already* ||.

Lay aside *Hypocrisy* and all *sinister Views*, and hear our publick Lessons with an honest *Intention to know the Will of God*, in order to *do it*. Without this, all our Labour will be in vain. *Insincerity* is a false *Medium*, through which it is impossible to see Things distinctly: It bribes the Judgment, and leads Men into gross Mistakes, even in the plainest and most obvious Matters. To make any considerable Proficiency in *divine Knowledge*, the *Eye* of the Mind must be *single, clear and open*, to receive the Beams of divine Light; the *Will* must be *disinterested, free*, and *unbiassed* with Passion, disposed to feel the commanding Force of Truth; the *spiritual Sense* must be *quick*, and *exercised* to discern spiritual Objects; the *Heart* and *Conscience* must be *tender*, and susceptible of religious Impressions. Again,

Let me exhort you to hear with an honest and particular *Application*. The Neglect of this is the grand Reason, why People generally profit so little by the best Instructions. It is not so much a heedless *Inattention* in our Hearers; it is not so much the

D

Defect

Defect of *Knowledge*, or of *Faith*, as the want of an honest *Application*, that hinders their Improvement. We may observe them listening with a sensible Pleasure, and *receiving the Word with Joy*; we may hear them commend a good Discourse, and applaud the Speaker, and yet they are never a whit the better. The charitable *Design* of the sincere Teacher is miserably disappointed; the great *End* of the Instruction is quite lost, because People *put it off*, as not belonging to them. They will readily enough apply it to others, but seldom reflect that it is calculated for, and may be highly useful to themselves.---- Beware of this fatal Mistake. Look upon the Preacher as speaking to each of you by Name: Look upon what is delivered as a Message to every *particular Person* in the Assembly. (Indeed the Subject of our Discourses is, for most Part, of an universal Concern.) When you hear a *Vice* condemned, of which Conscience tells you that you are guilty, presently *apply*, and say, "O my Soul, *thou art the Man*. This is "a Reproof and Warning directed to thee." When you hear a Duty recommended and enforced, say to yourselves, each of you, "This Advice is given to "me in particular; consider, O my Soul, the Importance of it; weigh the Sanction; observe the "Promise on the one Hand, and attend to the awful *Threatning* on the other."----- Such an *Application* is the Way to great *Improvement*.

Let me add, that the good Instructions you hear should be carefully *bid in your Hearts* \*; they should be treasured up in your Memory for future Use: An inestimable Treasure, indeed, they are; how rich! how happy! the Soul who possesses it, and knows how to improve it. You must not be *forgetful Hearers* of the Word: Its important Truths should often be the Subject of your Meditation, and the Entertainment of your Minds, in their solitary Hours.

This

\* Psal. cxix. 11.

This will fix their Impressions, and make them lasting. Hereby they will be converted into the spiritual *Food* and *Nourishment* of the Soul, and become its very *Habit* and *Temper*. In a Word,

You must *reduce into Practice* what you hear. You must be *Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only* \*. Religion is not an empty *Amusement*, an airy *Speculation* ; no, it is a *practical* Thing, the *Guide* and *Director* of Life, the *Spring* and *Principle* of Action. A right *Practice* is the proper *Fruit* of good *Doctrine*, and the ultimate *End* of all our publick Lessons. For the Sake of this we *teach* and you *hear* ; without this, all our Labour is lost. Great *Knowledge*, sound *Principles*, a noisy *Profession*, a flaming *Zeal*, without a good *Life*, signify nothing ; all is but like a *sounding Brass* and *tinkling Cymbal*. If you know these Things, happy are ye if ye do them †. He who *heareth the Sayings of our Saviour, and doth them not, is like the foolish Man, who built his House upon the Sand* §. All his Hopes of *Salvation* are vain and groundless ; like the *Spider's Web* ; like the *giving up of the Ghost*.---- Be persuaded then, my Brethren, to act a wise Part : Consult your own Happiness ; *hear the Word of God, and keep it* ||.----And how will it animate and encourage your *Teachers*, to observe your Progress in useful Knowledge, and the Advances you make in a good Life ! With what inward Pleasure will they reflect, that they have not *run in vain, or spent their Strength for nought* ! This, indeed, is the best and most substantial Return for all their laborious Service on your Account : This is infinitely more to a faithful Minister, than all your empty *Praises*, or even, than any temporal *Encouragement* and *Reward* you can give him.

To conclude, let us all heartily join in the pious Prayer of the Psalmist. *Let thy Priests, O Lord,*  
be

\* Jam. i. 22. † John xiii. 7. § Mat. vii. 26. || Luke xi. 28.



*be clothed with* RIGHTEOUSNESS, *and let thy Saints shout for Joy* \*. May all the Ministers of Jesus so *live and teach*, and may all People so *hear and improve*, as they may mutually concur in advancing the great End of Christianity here on Earth, and finally may become joint Possessors of immortal Bliss in Heaven.

And, unto this Happiness, may God, of his infinite Mercy, bring us all, through Jesus Christ.  
*Amen.*

\* Psal. cxxxii. 9.

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